



# Information Briefing

## IOWA SCHOOL BOARDS FOUNDATION

June 2008

Vol. 2 • No.3

### **Leadership in Early Childhood Education: Six Standards and Strategies for Principals**

The early years in a child's life are a special and unique time for growth and learning.

Quality preschool classrooms are busy, interactive environments that promote high-level learning experiences through developmentally appropriate, well-planned play activities. Comprehensive services such as extended-day childcare, health screenings and parent education and support services are offered to ensure both the needs of the children and their families are being met. Strong teacher-parent relationships are nurtured through frequent formal and informal visits, many occurring in the homes of families. Blended funding streams promote combined classrooms that serve children from different backgrounds, income and ability levels. A quality preschool is a sophisticated program that requires not only highly skilled teachers but the support from an administrator knowledgeable about early childhood growth, learning and development.

With the newly created Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, more Iowa schools are opting to provide preschool programming for four-year-old children. Moving from a K-12 to a *PreK-12* learning system is a paradigm shift that requires new and different knowledge, support and resources related to early childhood learning. A key role of the school board/superintendent team is to ensure the preschool program, whether housed in a district building or in a community-based center, receives administrative guidance and support from a principal whose expertise in teaching and learning goes beyond the K-3 grades and includes early childhood education.

In 2005, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published a guide entitled *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities - What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. The book identifies various indicators of quality preschool programs and has defined six standards for what principals should know and be able to do to reach those indicators. The guide offers "useful ideas, practices and tools that can help principals across the country bolster their leadership in pre-K learning." In addition, the six standards provide guidance for school board members and other educational leaders to ensure the preschool program receives the necessary administrative support most associated with short and long-term benefits for children.

Following is a compilation from NAESP's six standards that characterize leadership for early childhood learning:

## **Standard 1: Embrace early childhood learning.**

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***Effective principals embrace high-quality early childhood programs, principles and practices as the foundation for education throughout the school community.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Consider birth through age eight as a continuum of early learning;
- Engage the school community in understanding children’s early development and use that combined knowledge to strengthen learning throughout the school;
- Balance leadership and management roles to incorporate early childhood programs into the school’s culture and organizational structure;
- Articulate the value of early intervention to prevent later difficulties.

## **Standard 2: Engage families and communities.**

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***Effective principals work with families and community organizations to support children at home, in the community and in pre-K and kindergarten programs.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Acknowledge and support families as children’s first and most influential teachers;
- Provide early education experiences that are informed by young children’s cultural and community experiences;
- Act as a bridge between schools and community-based supports for young children and their families;
- Build coalitions with community organizations to strengthen learning for children from birth to the start of fourth grade.

## **Standard 3: Promote appropriate learning environments for young children.**

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***Effective principals recognize the role of rich learning environments for young children and help create them.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Promote environments that are developmentally and age appropriate and address individual ways of learning;
- Foster relationships that provide the foundation for children's learning;
- Cultivate children's social competencies;
- Ensure that facilities and learning opportunities promote children's health and safety.

### **Standard 4: Ensure quality teaching.**

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***Effective principals ensure high-quality curriculum and instructional practices that foster young children's learning and development.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Foster young children's eagerness to learn;
- Develop early literacy and numeracy skills to provide a foundation for later learning;
- Provide ongoing professional development for the school community to build teachers' eagerness to learn.

### **Standard 5: Use multiple assessments to strengthen learning.**

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***Effective principals use multiple assessments to create experiences that strengthen student learning.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Support teachers in using observation, records and portfolios of student work to demonstrate students' growth;
- Use assessments to identify learning barriers and design strategies to overcome them, plan new learning experiences and initiate discussions across grade levels;
- Develop systems for sharing information about program effectiveness between school systems and other providers;
- Educate parents and report to them on their children's development and individual progress.

## **Standard 6: Advocate for high-quality, universal early childhood education.**

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***Effective principals advocate for universal opportunity for children to attend high-quality early childhood education programs.***

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### *STRATEGIES*

- Use the trusted voice of the principal to advocate for the needs of young children in their communities;
- Become familiar with early childhood funding streams and policy issues;
- Keep the public and policymakers focused on the need for kindergarten programs that match the workday of mothers and fathers and the importance of quality pre-K in a continuum of learning that helps children and schools succeed.

More information about NAESP's six standards for effective leadership in early childhood learning can be found at [www.naesp.org](http://www.naesp.org) or by calling 1-800-38-NAESP. For additional information on quality early childhood education, including preschool collaboration tools and resources, visit [www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org](http://www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org) or contact Lou Ann Gvist at the Iowa School Boards Foundation at [Lgvist@ia-sb.org](mailto:Lgvist@ia-sb.org), (515) 288-1991 or 1-800-795-4272.

### **Reference**

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2005). *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*. Alexandria, VA.

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Additional funding provided through the generous support of:

